

EXPLAINING JAMMU AND KASHMIR CONFLICT UNDER INDIAN ILLEGAL OCCUPATION: PAST AND PRESENT

Salma Malik and Nasreen Akhtar*

Abstract

The Jammu and Kashmir conflict remains one of the oldest UN agenda items. However, despite the genuine plight and legitimate demand for the right to self-determination, Kashmiris in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir continue to struggle for their lives and livelihood under Indian oppression and state-sponsored terrorism without respite. This paper, therefore, attempts to glean into the history of the conflict, which has a strong connection with the contemporary situation, while answering important questions: What circumstances compelled people to rush to Kashmir soon after the independence? How has India, over the decades, interpreted, misinterpreted, and manipulated world opinion in its favour? Why and how have the Muslim world and international community shown apathy towards the beleaguered Kashmiris? Lastly, can there be a way forward, especially after India's illegal annexation of the UN declared disputed territory? It also highlights options available for a plausible solution to this humanitarian issue.

Keywords: Jammu Massacre, IIOJK, Shimla Accord, Article 370, EU DisinfoLab.

Introduction

August 2019 marked a new chapter in the tragic story of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), when India, under the fascist Modi regime, annexed the disputed territory unlawfully and in violation of UNSC resolutions. The Indian government has placed a perpetual curfew in IIOJK, which is the longest in perceivable history. Despite stiff criticism and condemnation within and outside the country, India continues to hold the territory unashamedly. The Modi government has been, since that time, engineering demographic changes in the illegally occupied territory. This being a priority item on Bhartiya Janata Party's (BJP) manifesto for several decades, which they could translate into reality under Prime Minister Modi only. On the other hand, Pakistan is continuously raising its objections against Indian unlawful actions and demanding the international community to come forward and take much-needed action to stop Indian state terrorism in IIOJK.

*Dr Salma Malik is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Dr Nasreen Akhtar is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University, Islamabad.

This academic study is, therefore, an effort to understand the genesis of the conflict, how the issue has evolved over the decades, what kind of human rights abuse the Kashmiri population is subject to, India's unilateral annexation of the occupied territory, and removal of its special status and how the world community including Muslim countries reacted to India's August 2019 action. Lastly, it highlights the option available for a plausible solution to this humanitarian issue. It is a descriptive study largely based on the analysis of a historical account of the conflict, which has a strong connection with the contemporary situation in IIOJK.

Genesis of Kashmir Conflict

At the time of the partition of British India, an important task for the boundary commission was the settlement and accession of princely states located across the region. These princely states covered 40% of the land territory and were home to 23% of the population.¹ Ranging from an area as little as 25 km² to 200,000 km² and supporting population groups that varied between 2-3000 to over 4 million population in the case of Jammu and Kashmir.² These states were given a choice to accede to either of the successor (independent) countries, namely India or Pakistan. The principle of accession was based on the geographical location of the state, and the respective rulers were to decide in accordance with the will of subject populations. Except for Jammu and Kashmir, Hyderabad Deccan, Junagadh, and Manavadar, the accession of all other princely states took place without conflict.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, which comprised of Jammu, Valley of Kashmir, and Ladakh under the Hindu Dogra rule, was predominantly a Muslim majority area with 77% of the population being Muslim. At the time of accession, Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh, unsure of his fate, decided to remain independent and offered a Standstill Agreement to both the dominions. Pakistan responded immediately and signed the agreement, whereas India sought more time to deliberate. The draft of said agreement was formulated on June 3, 1947, when Partition Plan was announced by the British government. It was agreed that all administrative arrangements that existed between the princely state and the British Crown would continue unaltered with the signatory dominion (Pakistan).³ Christopher Snedden, in a fact-finding account of Jammu and Kashmir history, states that Pakistan was the preferred choice of the ruling monarch.⁴

Soon after the agreement, a massive genocide against Muslims in the Jammu area took place, which was intentionally ignored by the British Viceroy turned Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten,⁵ and this heinous act was reduced to a negligible footnote of history. Maharaja, in connivance with the cadres of radical *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and his own Dogra force aided by Hindus and Sikh migrants from Pakistan, systematically exterminated thousands of Muslims from the Jammu region as they fled to Pakistan. Before this, Muslim soldiers who were part of the Dogra army and Muslim police personnel were disarmed and demobilized and the administration forced Muslims to surrender their arms.⁶ These arms along with

new weaponry were handed to Hindu and Sikh loyalists of Maharaja, which they ruthlessly used in their systematic pogrom against Muslims. Ved Bhasin, one of the few journalists of that time who raised their voice against these atrocities, stated in a 2003-testimony:

*Tension increased with a large number of Hindus and Sikhs migrating to the State from Punjab and NWFP and even from areas now under Pakistan's control. Trouble was brewing in Poonch, where a popular non-communal agitation was launched after Maharaja's administration took over the erstwhile jagir under its direct control and imposed some taxes. The mishandling of this agitation and use of brutal force by the Maharaja's administration inflamed the passions, turning this non-communal struggle into communal strife.*⁷

Bhasin further stated that RSS played a key role in these killings, aided by armed Sikh refugees, who even paraded the Jammu streets with their naked swords.⁸ The British government in Delhi and secularism touting Indian National Congress leadership comprising Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and others, intentionally ignored the news about the genocide of Muslims, thereby, making it difficult to document the exact number of people killed by RSS cadres, Hindu and Sikh marauders. However, independent British press sources⁹ of that time including a widely quoted article by Horace Alexander¹⁰ (published in the January 1948-issue of *The Spectator*) and later accounts by historians (which were corroborated by eyewitnesses to the massacre, such as Bhasin himself) put the figure of Muslims killed by Dogra administration between 200,000 to 237,000, with more than half-million forced into displacement across the border into the newly created state of Pakistan.¹¹

Additionally, women were abducted and raped in this systematic holocaust unleashed by the Dogra ruler and his marauders, who were given tacit approval by the Delhi-based leadership that could not see Kashmir joining Jinnah's Pakistan. The *Sangh Parivar* very proudly flashed its role in this holocaust, which "drastically changed the demographics and reduced a Muslim-majority Jammu province (then 61 percent) to a Hindu-majority region."¹² As Muslims fled their ancestral homeland, to which they had never been able to return, the majority lost their lives at the hands of RSS. "They were pulled out of the vehicles and killed mercilessly with the soldiers either joining [in] or looking [on] as idle spectators."¹³

The *Parivar*, according to Mittal,¹⁴ played a vital role in removing Ram Chandra Kak, the pro-independence Prime Minister of the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) state, and infiltrated the ranks of tribal warriors, who rushed to the aid of beleaguered Kashmiris. RSS used its influence in making Hari Singh's criminal act in Delhi's favour.¹⁵ Commenting on these developments, Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, accused RSS of orchestrating the violence in connivance with Maharaja.

Indian National Army and the RSS shifted their headquarters from Amritsar to Jammu. They were provided modern weapons by the state

authorities. They set about the formal business in Jammu and Poonch of repeating the horrible drama they had enacted in East Punjab.¹⁶

The Jammu massacre by no means was a solitary action. The Dogra rule since its establishment in 1846 under the Treaty of Amritsar was per se a Hindu Raj where, according to Bazaz, "Muslims were dealt with harshly in certain respects only because they were Muslims."¹⁷ The 1947-Poonch uprising, which led to the Jammu massacre, was preceded by several uprisings against Dogras in the past, most notably in 1865, 1924, and 1931.¹⁸ Snedden further terms the Jammu massacre as a prelude to the contemporary Kashmir conflict and one of the major reasons instrumental in the continuity of Pakistan-India acrimonious relations.¹⁹ "The events of Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir reveal the emergence of an establishment in New Delhi, which was indifferent to Indian Muslims."²⁰

The tribal fighters from North-western province came several days later in response to the Muslim massacre, an aspect India has intentionally distorted to legitimize its heinous role in the tragedy of J&K. As these 2000 odd tribesmen marched onto Srinagar, they faced minimal resistance at the hands of Maharaja forces, which were only strong enough to attack and kill unarmed civilians, especially Muslims. When Hari Singh became sure of losing the fight against tribal, he sent Sheikh Abdullah to New Delhi to seek help from the newly formed Indian government. The Indian Defence Committee under Governor-General Mountbatten decided to rush arms and ammunition to J&K without realizing that the situation had worsened because of Maharaja's wrongdoings against the Muslim majority in the state. Mountbatten, however, made this so-called assistance to Maharaja conditional by adding that "the question of State's accession should be settled by a reference to the people."²¹

Resultantly, in 1948, the princely state was divided into two parts as Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K). In the same year, the UNSC passed a series of resolutions 38, 39, 47, and 51²² seeking a peaceful resolution of the conflict by holding a free and impartial plebiscite in J&K and establishing a commission on India and Pakistan under the UN (UNCIP) to investigate and mediate the dispute. By the ceasefire agreement, a 460-mile-long Line of Control (LoC) was drawn between Pakistan (AJ&K) and India (IIOJK).

Jammu and Kashmir Conflict Through the Decades

Despite UN intervention, the promise of conducting a plebiscite remained unfulfilled. In 1952, Kashmir was given a special status in the Indian Constitution by introducing Article 370.²³ Unlike similar provisions for other special status areas, the official records of Indian constituent assembly deliberations treated J&K as an exclusive case owing to India's entanglement with the UN. According to International law experts:

*Article 370 was, thus, portrayed by India as an 'interim system' and labelled a 'temporary provision' which gave constitutional cover to the [disputed] Instrument of Accession by exempting Jammu and Kashmir from the provisions of the Indian Constitution and restricting Parliament's legislative power over the State to three subjects namely defence, foreign affairs and communications. If other constitutional provisions or other Union powers were to be extended to Kashmir, the prior concurrence of the State government was required. This concurrence was strictly provisional and had to be ratified by the State's Constituent Assembly. Negotiated over six months, it represented a solemn compact between the State of Jammu and Kashmir and India.*²⁴

In September 1965, a major war broke out between Pakistan and India, when *Mujahedeen* sought to liberate the occupied territories from Indian. Pakistan denied its role in the uprising and stressing the need for India to do serious soul searching as its oppression and tyranny had driven the people of Kashmir to take up arms for liberation.²⁵ The third Pakistan-India war, in 1971, cantered mainly in the East Pakistan sector, which led to the dismemberment of Pakistan. Consequently, on July 2, 1972, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed the Shimla Agreement. A watershed event as India since then declared Kashmir as a bilateral issue, whereby no third party would be involved including the UN, whereas, the text of the agreement gave primacy to the UN Charter. Clause 1(i) of the agreement states that "the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations shall govern the relations between the two countries."²⁶

Since then, India has not been accepting third-party mediation on the Kashmir issue, even if Pakistan sought UN intervention. However, India has never shied away from involving a third party, as and how it deemed suitable, for instance, the 1990-nuclear crisis,²⁷ the 1999-Kargil war,²⁸ and 2008-Mumbai attacks.²⁹ To consolidate itself further and strengthen its control in the occupied territories, Kashmir Accord was signed between Sheikh Abdullah and Indra Gandhi in 1975. It was termed as a one-sided agreement and capitulation by Sheikh Abdullah, who under the pressure of the Indian government gave up the long-standing demand of Kashmir's right to self-determination (pre-1953 status) to re-enter Kashmir politics.³⁰ Although a state administration maintained under Article 370, IIOJK had been a constituent unit of the Union of India by this accord.³¹ Thereby, the Indian government could legislate and effectively assert control over the illegally occupied areas, further muzzling the voices of the Kashmiri people.³² The state was only allowed "to have its own legislation on matters like welfare measures, cultural matters, social security, personal law and procedural laws in a manner suited to the special conditions in the state."³³

The decade of 1970s was tumultuous for Pakistan; first, it faced the trauma of dismemberment, then India's testing of the nuclear bomb in 1974. To redress this strategic imbalance and build an effective deterrence against India, Pakistan pushed the case for developing a nuclear muscle. In the following decades of the 1980s and 1990s, the Kashmir issue became somewhat dormant due to multiple factors, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the role Pakistan played. While

Pakistan remained focused on its western front, India sped up its quest to become a regional hegemon. However, very much cognizant of India's intents, Pakistan used its leverage as a conduit state in the Afghan war to develop its nuclear weapons program. After the end of the Afghan war, an indigenous uprising in IIOJK against Indian forceful occupation ignited. Furthermore, India involved the US in what came to be known as the 1990-nuclear crisis, when it cried wolf about Pakistan's alleged plans to wage nuclear strikes against India to liberate the occupied territories. However, in the wake of 9/11, India started presenting the Kashmiri freedom movement solely as cross-border terrorism; hence, attempting to weaken the narrative of Kashmiri Muslims and Pakistan on international fora.

Balance of power was created in the region when Pakistan tested its first nuclear weapon in 1998. Both states leaped forward in their relations by signing the Lahore Declaration in 1999. However, due to the Kargil crisis, the momentum broke down. It introduced a new dimension to the traditional rivalry, i.e., the possibility of waging sub-conventional limited war under the nuclear shadow and Kashmir problem thereon considered as a dangerous 'nuclear flashpoint', a term attributed to US President Bill Clinton. To malign and demonize Pakistan, the mass murder of 35 Sikh pilgrims was staged by Indian authorities on the eve of US President Clinton's visit to the region while blaming Pakistan. India capitalized well from this farcical tragedy, known as Chittisinghpura Massacre, as US President Clinton strongly condemned and admonished Pakistan for the horrible development.³⁴ It proved wrong in the light of the statements made by the survivors of this tragedy that the killings were carried out by Indian security forces.³⁵

Given the success of back-channel diplomacy during the Lahore peace process, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistan's Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf discussed the Kashmir issue at Agra Summit (2001), but this effort remained unsuccessful.³⁶ Another breakthrough was the Composite Dialogue Process in 2004 initiated at the SAARC summit, which led to a 4-point solution of the Kashmir issue proposed by General Musharraf in 2006. Initially, this proposal was welcomed by the Indian leadership; however, the BJP government rejected it, and the reconciliation process once again halted.³⁷ Another indigenous tide of freedom struggle rose in IIOJK after the 2016-killing of Burhan Wani, a 21-year-old freedom fighter who became an icon of Kashmiri youth voluntarily joining the liberation movement against Indian oppression.

Since Narendra Modi's victory in the 2014-Indian elections with BJP winning a majority in the parliament, the Hindutva ideology and Hindu nationalist sentiments have deeply eroded the secular foundations of the Indian state. Subscribing strongly to the RSS ideology, Modi has been waging an ethnic cleansing drive against the Muslims of India, including those in Indian-occupied territories. A systematic pogrom against Muslims has launched through the Citizenship Amendment Act (2019), National Register of Citizens (2020), cow vigilantism, mob lynching, and 2020-Delhi riots that claimed 53 Muslim lives with 200 injured as per official account.

Human Rights Abuses in IIOJK

Ever since the illegal occupation of India, there have been colossal human rights abuses in IIOJK. Several reports, published by the UN, US Congress, and many other fact-finding missions, have already highlighted this plight. People of IIOJK have faced several types of abuses, out of which lack of freedom to become a part of a state of own choice is foremost. Apart from these atrocities, India has also snatched freedom of expression³⁸ and freedom of association from the Kashmiris. It remains one of the highly militarized zones of the world.³⁹ In recent years, Indian forces have frequently used pellet guns and snipers against innocent Kashmiris. Gender-based violence is also one of the menaces of Indian illegal occupation. Rape is being used as a tool of torture by Indian forces. Forced disappearances turned into unmarked graves is also a grave human rights abuse. Even results of the investigation of extrajudicial killings were never publicized.⁴⁰

According to the UNHRC Report of July 2019, 586 people were killed in IIOJK in 2018,⁴¹ a year that marks the highest number of conflict-related casualties. Whereas, between 2008 to 2018, at least 40,000 Kashmiris have been killed.⁴² Pulwama, Shopian, Kulgam, and Anantnag remained highly affected districts. According to the report, 12-gauge pump-action shotgun firing metal pellets is one of the most lethal weapons used in IIOJK to control protesting crowds.⁴³ Not just youth and adults have been the victims, infants and minors have also been affected. According to Srinagar's Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital, the number of pellet gun victims has been almost 1200 from 2016 to 2018, reporting the loss of vision and many other injuries.⁴⁴ All these facts have repeatedly been highlighted by international human rights organizations, yet little has been done on the part of the UN to provide the people of Kashmir with their just right of self-determination.

Tactics Used by Indian Security Forces

The Indian government and security forces have been taking several systematic actions to oppress Kashmiris and not letting the world hear their cries. The 1990-Armed Forces Special Powers Act has provided extra-judicial powers to Indian forces and remains a major hurdle in any accountability regarding atrocities in IIOJK, thus, resulting in searches and arbitrary detention of innocent Kashmiris.⁴⁵ Due to these unchecked powers, no prosecution could be launched against Indian soldiers despite their heinous crimes. The infamous Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, which remained effective between 1985 to 1995, was replaced by the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance in 2001, which further empowered the Indian security apparatus. The 2010-Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, under the guise of tracking grants from foreign donors, has resulted in the harassment of humanitarian organizations and stymied their activities.⁴⁶

On August 5, 2019, the Modi government by abrogating Article 370, which had previously accorded J&K with a special autonomous status, incorporated IIOJK

into the Indian Union.⁴⁷ It was done by virtue of the J&K Reorganization Bill, passed in the Indian Parliament, that divided IIOJK into two Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir.⁴⁸ The impact of abolishing the said article was two-fold; first, it terminated the state's autonomy, which had already greatly eroded over the decades through umpteenth presidential orders and entries into the Union listing.⁴⁹ Secondly, it rendered Article 35-A null and void, which "protected native Kashmiris from displacement and any attempts to change the demographics of the state by preventing people from the rest of India from buying properties or acquiring certification as a permanent resident of Jammu and Kashmir or availing local government jobs."⁵⁰

Correspondingly, the abolishment of Article 35-A is one of the systematic tactics of the Modi government, where changing the demographic status of Kashmir is a prime objective. It implies granting citizenship and property rights to other ethnicities, mainly Hindus, leading to a shift in population figures and ultimately nullifying the claim of Kashmiri Muslims. Since August 2019, the people of IIOJK remain under a perpetual curfew, one of the longest in the history of the world, with their right to move, communicate, right to earn, and live a free life usurped by the Indian government. Indian Home Minister, Amit Shah, while addressing the Indian lower house, proposed the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution.⁵¹ It was only in 2019 that this plan was executed although it was in the pipeline since 1954. As mentioned in a report of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, several presidential orders (approximately 56) led to constitutional amendment.⁵² Apart from executive orders, three constitutional orders of 1954, 1986, and 2019 were also issued that further eroded the autonomy of the state of J&K.

It is pertinent to mention that constitutionally, Article 370 could be abrogated only by the decision of the J&K Constituent Assembly, which was already dissolved in 1956, while in 2018, Kashmir's legislature body was also dismantled leading to governor rule in the state.⁵³ This was not the first attempt to abrogate J&K's special status. In 1963, Indian Home Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda, had also proposed abrogation of Article 370 before the Indian parliament. However, this dream only materialized after the re-election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, who had promised it as part of the BJP election manifesto. To pre-empt any protests and retaliation, 450,000 extra troops were deployed with mainstream Kashmiri leaders placed under house arrest. Internet and communication services were cut down and a curfew was placed in the Valley, which continues. This situation has led to the internationalization of the Kashmir issue, as this unilateral act has rendered the Indian claim of J&K being a bilateral issue null and void.⁵⁴

In response, Pakistan highlighted Indian atrocities at the international fora and urged the international community to come forward and take necessary measures against the Indian illegal act. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan highlighted the issue both home and abroad, as well as from the UN platform and wrote a well-articulated article in the renowned US daily, *The New York Times* titled, "The World Can't Ignore Kashmir," in which, he said:

With the nuclear shadow hovering over South Asia, we realize that Pakistan and India have to move out of a zero-sum mindset to begin dialogue on Kashmir, various strategic matters and trade. On Kashmir, the dialogue must include all stakeholders, especially the Kashmiris.⁵⁵

Response of International Community

The Indian unilateral action of revoking J&K's special status and atrocities against Kashmiri Muslims gained the limelight across the world. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as the sole representative of the Muslim world, did condemn Indian brutality in J&K but seemed lenient in its approach towards India due to trade and economic relations. The UAE, in March 2019, invited India to become a part of the OIC session as a guest and in protest, Pakistan did not take part in the meeting. Moreover, in the wake of this event, the Indian Ambassador to UAE stated that "we expect that the changes would improve social justice and security and confidence of the people in the local governance and will encourage further stability and peace."⁵⁶ However, the world has witnessed it otherwise.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia termed the Kashmir issue as an internal issue of India besides fortifying several billions of dollars investment in India as a partnership between Aramco and Reliance.⁵⁷ It is pertinent to mention that more than 7 million Indians are working in Gulf states, hence, fostering economic relations between both states, while more than 2.7 million Indians are residing in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸ Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman did not even issue an official statement regarding the abrogation of Article 370. However, Turkey extended its full moral and diplomatic support to Pakistan at a time when the Gulf States were bestowing Modi with civil awards.⁵⁹

India's unilateral alteration of the constitutional and demographic status of the disputed territory has disregarded the UNSC resolutions, and the response of the international community remains limited. The Indian government continues its systematic cleansing of the Kashmiri Muslims, whereas Kashmiris stand resolute seeking their right to self-determination while facing extreme hardship and continuous suppression. Unfortunately, the western world that stands as a custodian of human rights, peace, and freedom is blind to the plight of the Kashmiris. It is appreciable that the previous US President, Donald Trump, offered mediation between the two countries. However, during his visit to India, Muslims were subjected to the worst form of communal violence, and the US did not condemn the viciousness. Somewhat similar has been the level of apathy from the other countries.

Possible Resolve of Kashmir Conflict

The best solution would be a fair and free plebiscite under the UN aegis as per the UNSC resolutions. However, the Indian leadership in the past and present, whether seculars or religious hardliners, never committed to nor would let this option work. Over the decades, Kashmiris have been suffering in all respects, and the worst

case is systematic and progressive demographic engineering by India, which emboldened the Modi government further to do anything without being challenged. Taking a leaf out of the Israeli occupation of Palestine,⁶⁰ it would not be surprising that the Modi government seeks a plebiscite after altering the demographic balance to its desire by flooding the region with the Hindu population.⁶¹

IIOJK has become more vigorous after the 2019-unilateral annexation, and the possibility owing to extreme demographic engineering is that India may end up manipulating a plebiscite in its favour in IIOJK. Would this imply freezing of the existing status quo, and the answer is it is not a new idea as in the past such options have already been proposed. First, the ceasefire line that was drawn post-1948 war and renamed as LoC after the Shimla Agreement has been maintained and guarded as a de facto border. Secondly, India has already constructed a 340-mile fenced barrier along the LoC despite Pakistan's reservations and in violation of UN resolutions.

When the question of accession came up at the time of partition, the option available to the princely states was to accede either to Pakistan or India. Any princely state that sought independence or standstill arrangement was tackled by India forcefully, point in case of Hyderabad Deccan, Junagarh, Manavadar, Sikkim, and Goa. None of the states could decide on its own and exercise the option to stay independent as it was not in the strategic interest of India. The same was the case with the state of Jammu and Kashmir, but its forceful accession turned out to be a conflict between Pakistan and India. However, the only lasting and acceptable solution to the problem is that the will and wish of beleaguered Kashmiri people be considered impartially as per the UNSC resolutions. The young Kashmiris remain confident and clear about seeking freedom and liberty from the Indian oppression and humiliation their forefathers were subjected to.

Conclusion

The Kashmiri youth of today are a generation who stand defiant against pellet gun attacks and hold Wani along with many such young Kashmiri martyred as their role model. They chant slogans of *Azadi*, *let's march to Muzaffarabad* and raise the Pakistani flag as an act of defiance. Funerals of resistance fighters are a celebration, with women and children chanting songs of *Azadi* and valour with the coffins mostly draped in the Pakistani flag. It is happening even though the Indian government, over decades, has invested heavily in its lobbying and perception-building efforts. Maligning Pakistan has been a dominant feature of Indian foreign policy. The disclosure of EU DisinfoLab through the Indian Chronicles unearthed a 15-year operation comprising an Indian deep network based on coercion, deceit, and disinformation targeting western capitals and the UN to serve Indian interests by influencing policymakers primarily against Pakistan.⁶² What needs to be understood is that India is forcefully maintaining its illegal hold on the Kashmir territory by exercising years of coercive strategy with lobbying and perception building for

irreversible changes in the occupied territory, which are being carried out under the guise of the curfew.

On Pakistan's part, the need is to adopt vigorous multi-track diplomacy, exercise well-informed lawfare, and sensitize multilateral fora, with Kashmiris taken into confidence. In the age of hybrid warfare, there is also a need to pre-empt kinetic and non-kinetic responses while having a strong economy and stable governance system. It will strengthen Pakistan's position in the international community and enable it to negotiate contentious issues, whether they be proverbial low-hanging fruits, such as Siachen and Sir Creek, or fundamental issues like Kashmir. India, after illegally annexing the disputed territory, is running a systematic and well-planned non-kinetic warfare in Gilgit Baltistan and Balochistan besides smearing a campaign against CPEC. In such hybrid warfare dynamics, a strong and resolute Pakistan can respond to these threats with acumen and logic and help Kashmiris seeking freedom from Indian illegal occupation.

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